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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: THE MAN WHO WRITES PUTIN'S FOREIGN POLICY BRIEFING PAPERS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Eric Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Putin has assembled for himself a small foreign policy team after moving from the Kremlin to the Russian White House, according to Yuri Kholkhov, a former MFA official who now prepares briefing papers for the Prime Minister. Russian prime ministers did not previously have a foreign policy apparatus, and Putin called upon former Ambassador to the U.S. Yuri Ushakov to create an office that reflects the unique position the current PM plays in Russian policymaking. Putin's foreign policy role is focused on economics, according to Kholkhov, who believes the PM works "tirelessly." Kholkhov recommended that in order to improve bilateral ties, the U.S. must address key Russian concerns over missile defense and NATO enlargement, and justified Russian PermRep to NATO Rogozin's behavior in this light. He maintained that the new NATO members drawn from Eastern Europe are pursuing an anti-Russian agenda, and that the GOR has information on weapons supplied to Georgia by these countries and Ukraine. End summary.

Putin's Foreign Policy Apparatus

¶2. (C) Former MFA Afghan section chief Yuri Kholkhov (strictly protect) told us recently about his job as deputy to Ambassador Yuri Ushakov, who heads Putin's small foreign policy staff. Kholkhov left the MFA in January to head an office consisting of three former MFA officials who are responsible for drafting Putin's foreign policy-related briefing papers and other documents. (Note: We believe a small number of MFA secondees work in Ushakov's office as special advisors. End note.) Kholkhov said that they typically receive voluminous amounts of material from various government ministries, digest it, then produce papers for Putin to read in advance of his encounters with foreign leaders, as well as talking points for use during the meetings themselves.

¶3. (C) Kholkhov explained that he was asked to work at the Russian White House by Ushakov, with whom he was acquainted from official trips to Washington when Ushakov was Russia's Ambassador to the U.S. He thought Ushakov extremely well informed on American politics, and believed that Putin relied upon him to understand developments in the U.S. Putin's foreign policy apparatus is small, just a handful of people, as this is a new invention that did not exist under the previous Prime Minister. According to Kholkhov, when Putin moved from the Kremlin to the White House, he left his Presidential foreign policy team in place for Medvedev and created a new, smaller version within the PM's office. Putin brought on Ushakov as his key foreign policy advisor, and Ushakov assembled a small staff drawn largely from the MFA. Kholkhov did not know what would become of the staff once Putin left the White House, and thought it would depend upon whether the next PM would be as engaged in foreign policy matters.

Putin the Soldier

¶4. (C) Kholkhov said that Putin's foreign policy role was primarily focused on bilateral economic relations, which was commensurate with his role as head of government. Since it was impossible to divorce economics from politics, the PM dealt with certain bilateral political issues, but left strategic issues to the Kremlin. He observed that Putin approached his job as a "soldier" who has a duty to serve Russia, and appeared to work tirelessly. Kholkhov did not claim any special insight into Putin's future plans, saying that it was simply his opinion that the PM had grown tired of the stresses of governing and did not intend to return to the Kremlin. (Note: In contrast, several of Kholkhov's former MFA colleagues told us that they believe he would wind up on the Kremlin foreign policy team when Putin returned to the Presidency. End note.)

What Irritates Russia

¶5. (C) Like many Russian officials who put the onus for improving bilateral ties on Washington, Kholkhov advised the U.S. to address several "irritants" that exist in the current relationship:

-- Missile Defense: Kholkhov said that Russian policymakers across the board saw MD as directed against Russia rather than Iran. He predicted that they would continue to object to U.S. plans for MD sites in the Czech Republic and Poland,

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no matter how the U.S. attempted to finesse this issue by proposing to work with Russia in other ways.

-- NATO Accession for Ukraine and Georgia: Kholkhov explained that many within the GOR believe that the U.S. continues to pursue rapid accession for Ukraine and Georgia, and advised U.S. officials to be explicit in discussions with their Russian counterparts as to whether the Obama Administration had rescinded this Bush Administration policy.

Kholkhov added that the GOR had detailed information on weapons supplied to Georgia since the August 2008 war, including the type and number of missiles, rifles, and ammunition. The GOR understood most of the material was supplied by Ukraine, with funding coming from another source, presumably the U.S. Weapons were also supplied by several Eastern European states that are new NATO members and considered hostile to Russia.

Rogozin the Hooligan

¶6. (C) Kholkhov said that Russian concern with the new NATO members helped explain the decision to send Dmitri Rogozin to serve as the Russian PermRep to NATO, where he has attempted to warn the U.S. and Western Europeans about the dangers presented by Eastern Europeans that are pressing their anti-Russian agendas upon the organization. Kholkhov thought Rogozin respected in Moscow, where he is referred to as "the hooligan" for his ability to shake things up. He added that despite the seemingly harsh nature of Rogozin's public statements regarding NATO, these were tame in contrast to the cables he sends back to Moscow. Kholkhov questioned the decision to expel two Russian diplomats from NATO, one of whom he knows personally, as particularly bad timing at a time when NATO-Russia relations appeared to be on the mend.

Bio Note

¶7. (C) Kholkhov told us that he was happy to take his new job in the Russian White House, which he saw as a significant step up from the MFA. He was tired of the work at the

ministry, where he spent 17 years working exclusively on issues involving Iran and Afghanistan. He resigned from the MFA, but is considered part of the "diplomatic reserve" and can petition to rejoin the ministry if he chooses.

18. (C) While Kholkhov can be critical of U.S. policies, he remains well disposed towards the U.S. and shows an active interest in understanding American politics and culture. He told us how, following an official visit to Washington, he and his wife rented a car and drove through the Northeastern U.S., and how he hopes to take a cross-country journey as well.

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